

ABSTRACT

ON AFRICAN PARLIAMENTS: CONSTITUTIONAL AND ELECTORAL ENGINEERING IN PLURAL SOCIETIES. (THE CASE OF FRANCOPHONE AFRICAN COUNTRIES)

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This paper will analyse the "institutions of political representation" – meaning electoral systems, political parties and parliaments - in Francophone African Countries (Benin, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Gabon Guinea, Ivory Coast, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Republic of Congo, Senegal and Togo).

In such heterogeneous societies the design of the electoral system (constituencies, ballot, electoral rolls, mathematical formulas) and the structure of the Parliament (unicameral or bicameral) are crucial points for the demand of inclusion of minority groups, traditional authorities and opposition parties. Beyond the classical dispute over the electoral systems, which juxtaposes the Proportional and the Majority System, the debate over the design of a suitable electoral system in a plural society should consider another issue, *id est* to which extent an electoral system should contribute to inter-groups accommodation (Horowitz, 1991), assuming what Lewis has stated, that "the surest way to kill the idea of democracy in a plural society is to adopt the Anglo-American electoral system of first-past-the-post" (Lewis, 1965).

This study will focus on:

- the qualification of the franchise and the introduction of the Independent Electoral Commission;
- the reforms of the electoral laws, to include some elements of groups and minority representation (quotas, reserved seats for minorities, separate rolls, positive gerrymandering, combination of the Proportional System and the First-Past-The-Post systems);
- the design of the upper chambers to mirror the differences of the society, following ethnic, linguistic, religious, socio-economic and professional lines, as in the case of Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, and to include traditional authorities.

In conclusion, it will present some suggestions over the management of multi-party elections and the relation between democracy and traditional authorities, and will consider Parliaments as a place where social and political conflicts could be institutionalised. In particular, lower chambers empower people with political rights and training in democracy, while upper chambers could be crucial for the inclusion of traditional authorities and minority groups.